

Tobacco 21 initiative gains movement at the University of Toledo

An initiative started at the University of Toledo is working to raise the legal age to use tobacco products from 18 to 21 in Toledo.

“Research tells us that 90 percent of those who provide cigarettes to kids under 18 are themselves under 21, so if we can delay people from purchasing tobacco until 21, we can reduce youth smoking,” said Mallory Rinckey, a first-year health education Ph.D. student.

Rinckey said that this new initiative, Tobacco21, started in a graduate-level methods and materials course in September 2015. At this time, she said that she was studying to get her masters of public health, and she has continued the project ever since.

“The main goal of this initiative is to protect our youth and young adults in the community,” Rinckey said. “I personally think this is an important issue because we know of all the negative health effects caused by tobacco and nicotine, and kids deserve to live a life without dependence.”

On April 11, Tobacco21 visited Student Government to present their ordinance, according to SG President Jimmy Russell.

“The people who were for it are very public health-minded,” Russell said. “I mean, tobacco is obviously very bad for people to use, so they figure if they raise the age it will reduce the issue and make it harder to get. There were a lot of health concerns.”

Russell said that some senators initially objected to

Tobacco21. He said that the main objection to the initiative was under the premise that since the country decides you are an adult at 18, you should be able to make these choices on your own.

“These are the people that are more in favor of reducing the drinking age to 18,” Russell said.

However, Russell said that the motion did pass.

Rinckey said that the main purpose of presenting the initiative and having SG vote on it was to showcase support from the community when they take the ordinance to state and county officials.

“We are going to Toledo City Council very soon, and before we go to City Council, we want to have as much support from people and organizations that will be impacted by a Tobacco21 policy,” Rinckey said.

The fact that UT is a smoke-free campus already is a contributing factor to the positive reception of the initiative, according to Rinckey, who praised the university for their commitment to a culture of “health and wellness.”

“The main tactic to get tobacco out of the hands of young people is to create barriers to accessing it and smoke free and tobacco free spaces are used often to reduce tobacco use,” Rinckey said.

Other states, including Hawaii and California, as well as 224 cities and counties, including Columbus and Chicago, currently adhere to the Tobacco21 policy.